Sources and Methods

by Ken Lawrence

. HOW THE CIA USES BUGS

According to Robert E. Lubow, the CIA uses insects for surveillance. In his book, *The War Animals*, Lubow told how the Agency used cockroaches to learn whether a certain man was visiting the Fifth Avenue apartment of a prominent New York socialite who was believed to be serving as a drop-off for a group of foreign agents.

This column will be a regular feature of the *CovertAction Information Bulletin*. The author will appreciate any tips, hints and suggestions for further research.

The CIA's technique employed a pheromone, a chemical secreted by female cockroaches which sexually excites males. In closely confined quarters, male roaches exhibit severely agitated behavior in the presence of the female pheromone, even if only minute quantities are present.

A CIA agent followed the target onto a crowded subway car during rush hour and deposited a small smear of the pheromone on the man's jacket while crushed against him.

(continued on page 7)

(continued from page 3)

Later, CIA agents surreptitiously entered the socialite's apartment with a cage of male cockroaches. When the roaches went wild, the CIA concluded the man had been there, as they had suspected all along.

This exotic method was also very costly. Lubow says it once took the U.S. Department of Agriculture nine months to extract 12.2 milligrams of pheromone from 10,000 virgin female roaches. This would have been enough, however, for the CIA to repeat its surveillance trick many times. But recently science has come to the rescue of the buggers. This year a team of chemists and biologists succeeded in synthesizing the pheromone and published their results (*Journal of the American Chemical Society*, April 25, 1979).

The first public reports of the synthesis suggested that the discovery might lead to a breakthrough in cockroach control. In a cover story, *Chemical and Engineering News* (April 30, 1979) speculated that the substance—called *periplanone B*—might be used to confuse the males and prevent them from mating. *Science News* (May 5, 1979) suggested the same thing. Although such research is continuing, W. Clark Still, the chemistry professor at Columbia University who solved the chemical mystery that made the synthesis possible, is much more cautious. He says periplanone B is only effective as an attractant over short distances.

Dr. Still was surprised to learn of the CIA's use of the pheromone. "It doesn't worry me too much," he said, when asked how his discovery might benefit the covert operators. "Very few people could repeat the synthesis." Then he added, "I've given away a number of samples. As far as I know they're all to reputable pharmaceutical houses." Maybe so, but if the roaches in your kitchen seem like they're acting a little crazy, you might begin to wonder.—